

# **The Holiday Chronicles**

## **Part Two: The Bar**

**By Elaine Calloway**

# Copyright Page

All contents are Copyright 2018, The Writers Canvas, LLC, Author Elaine Calloway  
All persons, places and things are fiction. Any resemblance to people, living or dead, is coincidence.

Many thanks to the “characters” of New York City who stirred this story in my imagination many  
years ago...

## Part Two

Benjamin Cook bristled in the frigid wind, the kind of wind that sent sharp pain through ligaments and bones. How could he have been so stupid as to leave his coat back at the hospital? His brain could be a stunt double for a medical encyclopedia, but he couldn't remember his own coat.

Then again, he'd been damn eager to get out of that place.

Most days, he loved the environment. The non-stop beeping of machines, the frenzied energy around the nursing station, the smell of disinfectant and the whirring of elevators all energized his psyche.

But not on days like today. Days like today, everything seemed bleak.

He looked up just in time for a pack of snowflakes to land on his nose. Damn snow, this early in December? January would be unbearable at this rate.

What was it with this white crap? Why did horrible events always coincide with snowy days?

Today would be yet another memory he'd need to escape, just like ten years ago.

The neon sign for the Midtown restaurant seemed to beckon him inside. Not that he was hungry, but he sure could use a glass of scotch. On the plus side, the place would be warm. What the hell? He hadn't planned to drink until he got home, but this was New York, the land of taxicabs.

The door was heavy, but he yanked it open and stepped inside the darkened room with wood accents along the ceiling, chair rail, and wood floors.

The place was empty. Strange. Guess other New Yorkers were smart and stayed home.

A young guy stepped through some rear doors and into the bar area. "Get you something, sir? Looks like it's getting worse out there."

Ben sat on one of the barstools. "Scotch. Neat."

"Sure. Just one thing—"

"What's that?"

The bartender frowned. "We got a delivery in earlier of scotch glasses, every one of them smashed. I've got to fill out an incident report and have paperwork coming out of my ears. All we have to serve drinks are champagne flutes."

"Scotch in a champagne flute?" Ben asked. "Well, why not? It may as well stay an insane day."

"One of those, eh?"

“Yeah.” Ben shook his head. “In fact, those champagne flutes don’t hold much. Bring me two of ‘em.”

The bartender smiled. “We had someone in earlier who ordered two glasses as well.”

“Oh?”

Where was this story going? Did all bartenders have to be social butterflies in order to get tips? Why couldn’t he just shut up and bring the drink out, pronto?

“Yeah, turns out that every year on this date, she comes here and orders two glasses and celebrates the anniversary of she and her husband, who died ten years ago.”

Eric coughed. The air had become trapped in his throat and wouldn’t dare release him to breathe. Holy cow, could the memories become any worse?

After three long seconds of clearing his throat, he barely whispered, “Sounds like a sad story.” The bartender grabbed a bottle of scotch and put it on the bar. For a split second, Ben considered taking the bottle and running out the door. Nope. Bad idea. Not to mention that Manhattan, like other cities, had cameras everywhere. *Crazed anesthesiologist caught running down Third Avenue with mediocre bottle of scotch.*

No. Not a good headline.

The bartender set two champagne flutes on the bar top. “Yep, we get some sad stories in here, particularly in winter.” He opened the scotch and filled the flutes. “I’m James, by the way. You need anything, you let me know.”

Ben reached for one and gulped it in one swig. Then the other. “Well, James, how about some more?”

James grinned wide as he poured two more drinks. “Now we’re talking!”

Ben groaned inwardly. He longed for more scotch but talking? Not so much.

The old clock’s ticking seemed to grow louder, as if the sound were on stereo-surround amidst the absence of words.

Ben longed to break the eerie sounds of a clock ticking with no other noise, but he couldn’t bring himself to do the cliché action—spilling his problems to a bartender.

But the clock’s tick-tick-tick sounded worse.

Ben took a slow swig of scotch.

“Sounds like there’s a story behind you coming in here without a coat, needing scotch so much that you’re fine drinking it in flutes,” James said.

“It’s a long story,” Ben whispered, enjoying the smoky flavor. “Not one you really want to hear, I’m sure.”

“Look around,” he said, gesturing to an empty bar. “It’s slow as ever. With the snow coming, we may not get anyone else in here tonight. Besides, don’t you know they give bartenders a therapy degree?”

Ben cocked an eyebrow. “I’m an anesthesiologist. I know a thing or two about degrees, thanks, but yes, I see your point, Mr. Bartender.”

“James, remember? So, what’s up on this cold night?”

“My patient died.”

The thick silence flooded the room within a matter of seconds.

James’s widened pupils had him looking like a deer in headlights.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to say it so bluntly,” Ben said. “I guess I just got tired of the words taking up space in my head. It’s all I’ve thought about since I left the hospital.”

James reached for a vodka bottle, poured a shot into a champagne flute, and hurled back a shot himself. “That’s rough, man.”

“Yeah.” Ben finished a swallow and placed the empty champagne flute on the counter. “And it wasn’t anything I could’ve predicted. I mean, he had a prior health condition and knew the risks. Every doctor warned him, and I spent extensive time to ensure I could do everything to keep the anesthesia at the correct levels.”

“That has to be hard to get past,” James said.

“It’s not the first time,” Ben muttered.

“No?”

“It always happens when the snow starts. I’ve only had one other patient die, a nice older man about ten years ago.” Ben shook his head. “He left behind a widow, and she kept crying and saying something about an anniversary.”

“Wow.” James leaned back against the back wall. “Everyone says life is short, but guess you have one of those jobs where you see it up close and personal.”

“That’s why they pay me the big bucks,” Ben said, unable to hide the sarcasm. “Truth be told, I’d forfeit this month’s salary if I could have a perfect record with my patients. But, no one does...”

James stood silent, seeming to chew on the conversation. “Can...can I get you anything else?”

Ben glanced out the window, swearing that he heard a whistle from a bike. “Nah, I’m okay.” He stood up, flipped down some cash and walked toward the door.

“Um, sir? You still have our champagne flute,” James called out.

Ben held the door open and stared at his hand. The guy was right. Damn, first he'd forgotten his coat, now he'd forgotten to leave the glass on the bar top? He was losing it—and fast.

“Oh, sorry.” Ben turned to go back inside, when a large silver blur sped out of nowhere, gripped the flute, and rolled away on a skateboard.

“Hey!” Ben turned to the bartender. “That guy dressed in silver stole the flute!”

James ran out, both of them yelling and searching for the restaurant's glass.

But the snow grew thicker, and all they could see was a tiny figure, all dressed in silver makeup, ride away and grow smaller and smaller into the snowstorm...